

Policy on **Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)**, prepared by the SPHE co-ordinator, SPHE teachers' representatives, parents' representatives and students' representatives

Athy Community College – a County Kildare Vocational school

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School Ethos and Philosophy

Our school policy on Social, Personal and Health Education, including the Relationships and Sexuality Education policy, has been developed in the context and ethos of our co-educational, multi-denominational and multi-cultural school and with reference to our Mission Statement:

"In a caring school, we are dedicated to fostering educational excellence, empowering all students to reach their full potential-academic and social, physical and spiritual. Through partnership and cooperation, we openly respect and nurture the dignity and uniqueness of each individual"

Rationale for Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) provides students with a unique opportunity to develop the skills and competence to learn about themselves, to care for themselves and others and to make informed decisions about their health, personal lives and social development. All of these decisions must be made in the context of the wider community. A student who has a high degree of self-worth and a sense of security will be more predisposed to school life and to the variety of learning situations it offers.

Current Provision of the SPHE programme:

At present in our school, teachers (mainly the tutors of first to third year) deliver the programme as part of their role in the pastoral care of our students. This is in addition to the Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) programme. On former occasions, a support person sometimes worked with a class on a specific topic. Up to 2000, one teacher covered the programme with almost all classes in the junior cycle. Since then, tutors and a teacher have been released on a gradual basis in order to attend in-service training in the content and methodology of the delivery of the programme. See under in-service training below. At senior cycle, students taking the Leaving Cert. Applied cover many of the issues raised in the programme as part of the Social Education module and in the Religion classes. For those students taking the more traditional Leaving Cert., we rely on visiting facilitators on an annual basis to discuss e.g. relationships and sexuality, drugs' awareness and some topics may be addressed in the religion classes.

The **aims** of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme:

- To add to the creation of a school community which promotes good relationships and mutual respect and which encourages personal development.
- To focus on the development of each student's feelings of self-worth and self-confidence.
- To provide opportunities for reflection and discussion.
- To assist students in developing a critical understanding of influences in their world, from the media, their peers and people in the home, school and community.
- To prepare our students for a constructive and fulfilling role in their community and society.
- To promote physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health and well-being.
- To develop healthy attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identities, relationships and intimacy.

The **Objectives** of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme:

Social, Personal and Health Education should enable the students to

- identify and name feelings. Distinguish between feelings and actions
- develop a framework for making informed and healthy choices and decisions
- develop an awareness that decisions and actions have consequences
- listen to and respect different opinions
- understand the difference between passive, aggressive and assertive behaviour
- develop skills in the use of assertive behaviour.

Guidelines for the Management and Organisation of SPHE in our School

A Supportive School Environment:

In the weekly class of the Social, Personal and Health Education programme, the students and their teachers will deal with a wide range of issues covering the principles of respect and tolerance, health education and personal and social development. However, to be effective, the programme needs to be supported by a positive school climate and atmosphere. The development of an appreciation for learning, respect and caring for self and others, a sense of belonging and a sense of social responsibility, are tasks for the whole school community. The ways in which members of the staff relate to one another and to the students, and the quality of relationships between the students themselves, form the foundation for personal and social development in the school.

A supportive school environment is essential if Social, Personal and Health Education is to be effective. In such an environment the curriculum guidelines stress the need for a supportive school environment in which:

- People feel valued
- Self-esteem is fostered
- Fairness and tolerance are evident
- High expectations and standards are promoted
- Those experiencing difficulty are supported
- Communication is open
- Effort is recognised
- Uniqueness and difference are valued
- Conflict is handled constructively
- Initiative and creativity are encouraged
- Social, moral and civic values are promoted

The structure of the SPHE programme: Through participating in the SPHE programme, the young person will encounter a wide range of issues through a variety of learning experiences. These issues will be addressed in ten modules, each of which appears in each year of the three-year cycle, often under different headings and from a variety of perspectives. The emphasis will be on building skills, understanding, attitudes and values important in all these areas.

The ten modules are:

- Belonging and Integrating
- Self-management:
- A sense of purpose
- Communication Skills
- Physical Health
- Friendships
- Relationships and Sexuality
- Emotional Health
- Influences and Decisions
- Substance Use
- Personal Safety

The SPHE programme will be presented to our students in ways that aim to be in tune with their emotional, moral, social and spiritual growth, as well as their intellectual and physical development. Due to the fact that the socio-economic background of the students, as well as their physical and cultural environment, can have a significant impact on the range of choices and options that our students may face, the SPHE team will give due regard to these contextual factors when planning for SPHE.

Timetabling: The Department of Education and Science circular no. M22/00 states that the recommended time allocation is one class per week, organised in a way that best meets the needs of students and the school organisation. (This is in addition to the period allocated to Civic, Social and Political Education - CSPE).

Allocating time to a topic. The topics within each module are outlined in the Department of Education and Science's SPHE guidebook, and the aims and outcomes are indicated. Not every topic will take a whole class period, while other topics may require a number of class periods. Modules may contain topics or aims that are common to other modules. Such an overlap is essential to an integrated and holistic programme. All modules are revisited each year, as the programme is spiral and developmental in nature and age appropriate in content.

The modules - order of teaching.

The teacher may order the modules according to the school or class needs or circumstances. Five to six periods are to be assigned to RSE each year. It is strongly recommended that the modules on Friendship, and Relationships and Sexuality, be closely linked.

Methodology will include

group discussion	art work	visualisation	projects
brain-storming	story board	ranking exercises	debates
role play	videos	visitors	dilemma boards

The teacher and the class need to establish ground rules at the outset of the year. Such ground rules need to include – that everyone has the right to be listened to, respected and valued
that personal abuse and ridicule is not allowed
that rules of confidentiality be established in the class.

Cross Curricular support: Subjects such as Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE), Religious Education, Science, Home Economics and the Social Education module in the Leaving Cert. Applied may also deal with topics related to SPHE but, given the methodological approach that is at the core of SPHE, the main focus of the programme should be on the designated class period.

Visitors: From time to time, we may avail of Health Board, Community and parental expertise in the delivery of the programme. The approach to be taken by the speaker, and their purpose in speaking to the students, will be carefully considered by the SPHE co-coordinator/tutor, in line with our policy. In order to be most effective, speakers will be part of the on going and planned SPHE programme. Parents will be informed, in writing, of any visiting speakers to the school.

SPHE teachers: Given the importance of the whole-school climate for successful SPHE, it is clear that in many ways every teacher is a teacher of SPHE. Teachers directly involved in the SPHE programme have a particular responsibility and require particular support. Teachers assigned to SPHE need to understand the methodologies associated with education in this area. SPHE should not be assigned to teachers without consultation and an opportunity to attend in-service. At present in our school, it is mainly the tutors who deliver the programme as part of the pastoral care side of their job.

In line with good teaching practice and parental wishes, the SPHE teacher may refrain from answering pupils' questions and comments that are not considered age appropriate or relevant to the classroom topic. Information on relevant support agencies will be provided for students and posted on the student notice boards in the school.

Home and Parents

Parents have the primary responsibility for the Social, Personal and Health development of their children. Their contribution and involvement will be vital to the effective implementation of the SPHE curriculum. The school through its staff and, in particular, tutors, year heads, and the HSCL co-ordinator, will provide support and information for parents on their role in supporting their children in the learning process and, in particular, the personal topics covered in the SPHE programme.

Parents are invited to work in partnership with the SPHE team in developing the programme and reviewing the policy. Parents may be invited in from time to time, when information on topics is requested, e.g. tobacco, alcohol and other drugs' awareness programmes and the Relationships and Sexuality Education programme.

Assessment of Students: SPHE does not sit easily with the kinds of assessment usually associated with assessment for certification in the Junior Certificate examination so the Department of Education and Science (DES) will not formally examine this subject.

New Understandings of Assessment:

SPHE has a strong affective dimension, how can 'progress' in feelings and attitudes be measured? E.g. the students' knowledge about drugs could be assessed more easily than their attitudes towards substance abuse.

With advances in understanding of how learning takes place, we have been asked to see assessment, not only as the measurement **of** learning (after a lesson), but of putting a new emphasis on feedback at the heart of the lesson **for** learning to take place. This is particularly significant for SPHE with its focus on students' self-awareness and self esteem. Research has shown that the average student responds to constructive comments much more than to marks or grades. A greater focus is now placed on the sharing of information by the teacher **with** the student so that the learner can plan for better learning by comparing what he/she is learning with the aims and objectives of each lesson and look forward to the next stage. See SPHE Guidelines for Teachers, DES, 2001, P60-70

In addition to the above, other methods recommended by the DES include

Self-assessment: Students may be provided with questionnaires/worksheets on which they can record their own perceived progress in a given skill. This type of assessment should be seen as an integral part of the teaching, learning and assessment process and should be based on criteria that are clear to the teacher and student. Sometimes this assessment remains private, at other times it could be put into the student's workbook and/or used for further discussion.

Peer-assessment: Groups of students, facilitated by the teacher, evaluate how well they work as a team.

Assessment of students by the teacher: This would involve the assessment of students' work and skills through specific tasks, homework or project work and discussion with the student. Samples of work completed in SPHE are to be kept in the student's workbook. Such work might be shown and discussed at home as a basis for effective communication.

Provision of Ongoing Support, Development and Review

The SPHE co-ordinator shall

- use the allocated space on the staff notice-board to notify teachers, in addition to personally informing SPHE teachers and school management of forth-coming in-service days run by the DES for teachers of SPHE and encourage attendance at the same.
- discuss release of teachers of SPHE to attend in-service with school management in time for alternative arrangements for substitution to be made.
- discuss course content and methodology with SPHE teachers and suggest materials for use in the programme.
- outline the course content and methodology to teachers new to the SPHE programme.
- keep a record of materials borrowed, posters, books, videos etc. (for stock-taking purposes)
- keep a record of in-service attended by SPHE teachers and inform them of the next level of in service offered to them by the DES.
- Meet regularly with tutors of SPHE; promote an integrated approach with other teachers and subjects, as every subject has an SPHE dimension.

In-service training.

Stage 1: A two-day introduction to SPHE course content and methodology.

Stage 2: A two-day advanced training programme focusing on the core issues of Self-Esteem, Assertive Communication, Decision Making, Influences and Feelings.

Stage 3: A two-day Relationship and Sexuality Education training programme. (This is aimed specifically at teachers who have completed Stage 1 and Stage 2 or who have other relevant training in the area of SPHE).

Stage 4: A series of one day, topic based training days addressing the SPHE issues of Physical Health, Mental Health, Sexual Health, Sexual Orientation and Substance Use. (This is aimed specifically at teachers who have completed Stages 1,2 and 3 or who have other relevant training in the area of SPHE).

Other events on offer to teachers of SPHE include a day for teachers involved in co-ordination and planning SPHE at Junior Cycle, and a Resource evening when teachers will have the opportunity to view current SPHE resources.

An annual in-service training day for co-ordinators

Programme evaluation:

This will involve an on-going evaluation of the programme, structure, materials and methodologies.

Teachers, students, parents and management may be consulted in this evaluation.

Review materials and, in consultation with the teachers of SPHE, decide on resources to be ordered every year. Funding for this to be discussed with the Principal.

Resources: Those recommended by the Department of Education, and material (in line with this policy document) the SPHE team might decide to use

Future Review:

To set up an SPHE team to look at the SPHE programme in the school in collaboration with parents and students' representatives. Suggestion of possible staff to be involved:

The SPHE co-ordinator

One SPHE teacher from each year

Representatives from other departments, to coordinate the presentation of material, especially at the Senior Cycle level

PARENTS: Representatives could be from the Parents' Association, parents on the Board of Management and parents involved in Home, School, Community Liaison activities.

STUDENTS: Representatives could be from the senior student mentoring body and the student council as they are part of the overall programme for the development of social and personal skills.

Review the SPHE policy to discuss course content and methodologies every two years or as the need arises.

Policy on **Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)**, prepared by the SPHE co-ordinator, SPHE teachers' representatives, parents' representatives and students' representatives

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School Ethos and Philosophy

Our school policy on Relationships and Sexuality Education, has been developed in the context and ethos of our co-educational, multi-denominational, multi-cultural school and with reference to our Mission Statement:

"In a caring school, we are dedicated to fostering educational excellence, empowering all students to reach their full potential-academic and social, physical and spiritual. Through partnership and cooperation, we openly respect and nurture the dignity and uniqueness of each individual"

Rationale for Relationships and Sexuality Education:

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge and understanding and of developing attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy. This education is delivered both consciously and unconsciously by parents, teachers, peers, adults and the media. Through a structured programme, opportunities are provided for students to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that will help them to form values and to think and act in mutually respectful, caring and responsible ways

Relationship of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) to Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

In Athy Community College, Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) will be taught in the context of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) supported by cross-curricular opportunities and a school climate marked by gender equity and a healthy respect for sexuality. Every staff member has a role to play in the delivery of the school's RSE programme.

SPHE is "spiral developmental in nature and age appropriate in content and methodology", as is the RSE programme outlined in this document. SPHE deals with issues of self-esteem, assertiveness, health, communication and decision-making skills – all of which contribute to the effectiveness of the RSE programme. SPHE encourages students to develop as active and responsible adults in the personal and social aspects of our school, as well as in the wider community, and to make responsible decisions that respect their dignity and that of others.

Current Provision of the RSE programme:

The RSE programme is taught as part of the SPHE programme. At present in our school, teachers (mainly the tutors of the first to third years) deliver the programme as part of their role in the pastoral care of our students. On former occasions, a support person sometimes worked with a class on a specific topic. Up to 2000, one teacher covered the programme with almost all classes in the junior cycle. Since then, tutors and a teacher have been released on a gradual basis in order to attend in-service training on the content and methodology of the delivery of the programme. (See under in-service training below). At senior cycle, students taking the Leaving Cert. Applied cover many of the issues raised in the programme as part of the Social Education module and in the Religion classes. For those students taking the more traditional Leaving Cert., we rely on visiting facilitators on an annual basis to discuss e.g. relationships and sexuality, drugs' awareness and some topics may be addressed in the religion classes.

Aims of our Relationships and Sexuality Education Programme:

- To help young people understand and develop healthy friendships and relationships
- To promote an understanding of sexuality
- To promote a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and in one's relationships with others
- To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction
- To enable students to develop attitudes and values towards their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework

Objectives: Relationship and Sexuality education should enable students to:

- acquire the understanding and skills necessary to form healthy friendships and relationships
- develop a positive sense of self-awareness, and the skills for building and maintaining self-esteem
- become aware of the variety of ways in which individuals grow and change, especially during adolescence, and to develop respect for differences between individuals
- understand human physiology, with particular reference to the reproductive cycle, human fertility and sexually transmitted infections
- understand sexual development and identity and explore aspects of sexuality including sex role stereotyping, gender issues and cultural influences on sexuality
- value family life and appreciate the responsibilities of parenthood
- develop strategies for decisions and actions consistent with personal moral integrity and respectful of the rights and dignity of others
- develop skills for coping with peer pressure, conflict and threats to personal safety

Some of these objectives will be supported by other elements of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme, by the broader curriculum and the whole school climate.

Guidelines for the Management and Organisation of RSE in our School:

Parents and the Home: While the home is the natural environment in which relationships and sexuality education takes place, we have common concerns for the health, safety, security and well being of the students. As such, the work of RSE in the school is designed to be supportive of the work of parents. Parents are aware of the contemporary cultural context in which their adolescents are growing to adulthood. They are aware of the religious traditions, civic, moral, spiritual, familial and personal values and priorities which they hold to be important and which they try to hand on to their children. Our programme, planned in consultation with parents, attempts to reflect these values. **Parents have the right to withdraw their child from any aspect of the programme that they feel is inappropriate.**

The Moral Framework:

The aims of RSE set it firmly within a moral, spiritual and social framework. A positive attitude towards sexuality will be expressed in responsible and respectful attitudes and behaviour towards oneself and others. It will recognise that sexual behaviour is not just a personal and private matter, but has social and community implications as well. Sexual intercourse and other types of sexual behaviour will be portrayed as expressions of intimacy – and not appropriate to casual encounters. Decisions about such attitudes and behaviour are made in the light of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes delivered in RSE, inside and outside the school.

A Supportive School Environment:

Given the importance of the whole-school climate for successful RSE, it is clear that in many ways every teacher is a teacher of RSE. An effective programme of RSE as part of broader SPHE must be supported by a school climate marked by gender equity and a healthy respect for sexuality.

RSE teachers: Teachers directly involved in the RSE programme have a particular responsibility and require particular support. Teachers assigned to RSE need to understand the methodologies associated with education in this area. RSE should not be assigned to teachers without consultation and opportunities to attend in service. At present in our school, it is mainly the tutors who deliver the programme as part of the pastoral care side of their role. (See "Current Provision of the RSE programme" above).

In line with good teaching practice and parental wishes, the RSE teacher may refrain from answering pupils' questions and comments that are not considered age appropriate or relevant to the classroom topic. Information on relevant support agencies will be provided for students and posted on the student notice boards in the school.

The Structure of the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme:

Timetabling: The Department of Education and Science circular no. M22/00 states that the recommended time allocation for Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is one class per week, organised in a way that best meets the needs of students and the school. (This is in addition to the period allocated to Civic, Social, and Political Education (CSPE)). Out of the SPHE programme in operation in the school, 5 to 6 periods are to be assigned to Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) each year. Like the other modules in the SPHE programme, RSE is spiral and developmental in nature and age appropriate in content.

The teacher teaches this module annually according to the school or class needs or circumstances. It is strongly recommended that the modules on Friendship, and Relationships and Sexuality, be closely linked.

Methodology will include

group discussion	art work	visualisation	projects
brain-storming	story board	ranking exercises	debates
role play	videos	visitors	dilemma boards

The teacher and the class need to establish ground rules at the outset of the year. Such ground rules need to include – that everyone has the right to be listened to, respected and valued
that personal abuse and ridicule is not allowed
that rules of confidentiality be established in the class.

Cross Curricular support: Subjects such as Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE), Religious Education, Science, Home Economics and the Social Education module of the Leaving Cert. Applied may also deal with topics related to RSE but, given the methodological approach that is at the core of RSE, the main focus of the programme should be on the designated class period.

Visitors: From time to time, we may avail of Health Board, Community and parental expertise in the delivery of the programme. The approach to be taken by the speaker, and their purpose in speaking to the students, will be carefully considered by the SPHE/RSE co-coordinator/tutors, in line with our policy. In order to be most effective, speakers will be part of the on going and planned RSE programme. Parents will be informed, in writing, of any visiting speakers to the school.

Resources: Those recommended by the Department of Education, and material (in line with this policy document) the SPHE/RSE team might decide to use

Assessment of Students: RSE does not sit easily with the kinds of assessment usually associated with assessment for certification in the Junior Certificate examination so the Department of Education (DES) will not formally examine this subject.

New Understandings of Assessment:

RSE has a strong affective dimension, how can 'progress' in feelings and attitudes be measured? E.g. the students' knowledge about reproduction could be assessed more easily than they're having a positive and respectful attitude towards themselves and others.

With advances in understanding of how learning takes place, we have been asked to see assessment, not only as the measurement **of** learning (after a lesson), but of putting a new emphasis on feedback at the heart of the lesson **for** learning to take place. This is particularly significant for RSE with its focus on students' self-awareness and self esteem. Research has shown that the average student responds to constructive comments much more than to marks or grades. Now a greater focus is placed on the sharing of information by the teacher **with** the student so that the learner can plan for better learning by comparing what he/she is learning with the aims and objectives of each lesson and look forward to the next stage. For further information see DES, SPHE Guidelines for Teachers, 2001, pps 60-70.

In addition to the above, other methods recommended by the Department of Education and Science include:

Self-assessment: Students may be provided with questionnaires/worksheets on which they can record their own perceived progress in a given skill. This type of assessment should be seen as an integral part of the teaching, learning and assessment process and should be based on criteria that are clear to the teacher and student. Sometimes this assessment remains private, at other times it could be put into the student's workbook and/or used for further discussion.

Peer-assessment: Groups of students, facilitated by the teacher, evaluate how well they work as a team.

Assessment of students by the teacher: This would involve the assessment of students' work and skills through specific tasks, homework or project work and discussion with the student. Samples of work completed in SPHE are to be kept in the student's workbook. Such work might be shown and discussed at home.

Provision of ongoing Support, Development and Review:

The SPHE co-ordinator shall

- use the allocated space on the staff notice-board to notify teachers of RSE, in addition to personally informing them and school management of forth-coming in-service days run by the DES for teachers of RSE and encourage attendance at the same.
- discuss release of teachers of RSE to attend in-service with school management in time for alternative arrangements for substitution to be made.
- discuss course content and methodology with RSE teachers and suggest materials for use in the programme.
- outline the course content and methodology to teachers new to the RSE programme.
- keep a record of materials borrowed, posters, books, videos etc. (for stock-taking purposes)
- keep a record of in-service attended by RSE teachers and inform them of the next level of in service offered to them by the DES.
- Meet regularly with teachers as RSE explores issues that may give rise to differing views and sensitivities therefore all teachers need to be aware of the school's RSE policy. Promote an integrated approach with other teachers and subjects, in particular at senior cycle level where the SPHE/RSE programme is not timetabled as yet.

In-service training:

The two-day Relationship and Sexuality Education training programme is integrated into the training for teachers of Social, Personal and Health Education programme as outlined below.

Stage 1: A two-day introduction to SPHE course content and methodology.

Stage 2: A two-day advanced training programme focusing on the core issues of Self-Esteem, Assertive Communication, Decision Making, Influences and Feelings.

Stage 3: A two-day Relationship and Sexuality Education training programme. (This is aimed specifically at teachers who have completed Stage 1 and Stage 2 or who have other relevant training in the area of SPHE).

Stage 4: A series of one day, topic based training days addressing the SPHE issues of Physical Health, Mental Health, Sexual Health, Sexual Orientation and Substance Use. (This is aimed specifically at teachers who have completed Stage 1, 2 and 3 or who have other relevant training in the area of SPHE).

Other events on offer to teachers of RSE include a day for teachers involved in co-ordination and planning SPHE/RSE at Junior Cycle, and a Resource evening when teachers will have the opportunity to view current SPHE/RSE resources.

An annual in-service day for coordinators.

Programme evaluation:

This will involve an on-going evaluation of the programme, structure, materials and methodologies.

Teachers, students, parents and management may be consulted in this evaluation.

The SPHE coordinator will review materials, in consultation with the teachers of RSE, and decide on resources to be ordered every year. Funding for this to be discussed with the Principal.

Parents:

The school, through the SPHE coordinator, will support the efforts of parents to provide educational opportunities for other parents in the area of relationships and sexuality education.

Review: To set up an SPHE/RSE team to look at the RSE programme in the school in collaboration with parents and students' representatives. Suggestion of possible staff to be involved:

The SPHE co-ordinator

One SPHE/RSE teacher from each year

Representatives from other departments, to coordinate the presentation of material, especially at the Senior Cycle level

PARENTS: Representatives could be from the Parents' Association, the parents on the Board of Management and parents involved in Home, School, Community Liaison activities.

STUDENTS: Representatives could be from the senior student mentoring body and the student council as they are part of the overall programme for the development of social and personal skills.

Review the RSE policy to discuss course content and methodologies every two years, or as the need arises.

The RSE policy Committee

This committee was made up of the SPHE coordinator: Shirley Butler

Parents: Liz Meredith, Colette Moore, Marian Watchorn and Tina Whelan

An Assistant Principal and year head: Moira Finnegan

A tutor: Fiona McEvoy

Meetings were held in 2003 to input into the draft policy, which was then drawn up.

In May 2004, all parents were invited to a meeting to discuss the SPHE/RSE programme and to a further two meetings at which the policy was discussed along with other policies.

Further meetings of the policy committee were held in November 04 and the spring of 05.